



What is being done to  
improve the safety of  
**ROMAINE  
LETTUCE?**

In light of recent foodborne illness outbreaks involving romaine lettuce, the U.S. produce industry is taking action with multiple efforts underway to prevent future illnesses.

### **1. STRICTER FARMING PRACTICES**

Lettuce farmers in California and Arizona have banned the use of untreated surface water for irrigation 21 days prior to harvest. Additionally, they have increased the required distance between crops and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. These food safety practices are required as a part of the LGMA food safety program, whose members farm 94% of U.S. lettuce.

### **2. FARM WORKER TRAINING**

The LGMA is conducting free training to help farmers in California and Arizona incorporate the new food safety practices into their operations. Other organizations who work with the agricultural community — including Western Growers and The Grower/Shipper Association of Central California — have also begun doing outreach and training to help farmers comply with the new food safety requirements.

### **3. IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES**

Western Growers is conducting a review and technical assessment of LGMA's food safety practices. Food Safety experts and recent research findings are informing the process. Western Growers will present independent, 3rd party analysis of potential changes to the LGMA for consideration and adoption.

Additionally, the LGMA has created a series of subcommittees to review and address all aspects of the food safety practices. Subcommittees on agricultural water standards, soil amendments, and harvest equipment sanitation have already begun meeting regularly. Another subcommittee will be appointed to address issues related to the proximity of animal operations to fields.

### **4. RESEARCH INITIATIVES**

The Center for Produce Safety (CPS) funds research to find solutions for important food safety issues. Since it was established in 2007, CPS has invested \$29 million in government grants and industry contributions to conduct 172 research projects.

FDA-CFSAN is partnering with the University of Arizona, the Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation & Drainage District, and the local Yuma industry on a multi-year study of growing practices and the environment in Yuma, AZ. The goal is to learn how environmental influences in the region impact the risk of produce becoming contaminated. The study is funded by the FDA and findings will lead to recommendations for farmers on best practices to enhance food safety.



The FDA and the California Department of Agriculture also plan to facilitate a similar study in California to characterize and mitigate risk brought about through the environment.

## 5. SUPPLY CHAIN JOINT EFFORTS

Following the November 2018 outbreak linked to romaine lettuce, national produce industry associations came together to form the Romaine Task Force. This effort is being spearheaded by the Produce Marketing Association and the United Fresh Produce Association. It involves over 100 stakeholders who are examining critical areas where improvements need to be made across the romaine supply chain. They have focused on four areas: science/prevention, traceability, provenance labeling, and the investigation/collaboration process. An initial report with proposed recommendations is available [here](#).

A group of some of the nation's largest retailers and restaurants have also formed a coalition to focus on strengthening prevention and modernizing traceability. This effort, called the Leafy Greens Safety Coalition, includes Costco, Kroger, Walmart, Wegmans and Yum! Brands. The Coalition has stated publicly that it supports the recommendations of the Romaine Task Force (above) and is committed to working with its suppliers to further strengthen food safety specifications.

## 6. PATHOGEN TESTING

The FDA has announced that it will conduct a focused assignment to collect samples of raw agricultural commodity romaine lettuce to test for Salmonella and pathogenic *Escherichia coli*. The FDA plans to collect over 270 samples of romaine lettuce from November 2019 to November 2020. This effort is intended to help the FDA, Centers for Disease Control and state public health agencies to identify sources and factors that may contribute to contamination, so they can be addressed.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Arizona LGMA, Teresa Lopez, Administrator, [tlopez@azda.gov](mailto:tlopez@azda.gov)

California LGMA, Scott Horsfall, CEO, [scott@lgma.ca.gov](mailto:scott@lgma.ca.gov)

Center for Produce Safety, Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli, Executive Director, [bonnie@centerforproducesafety.org](mailto:bonnie@centerforproducesafety.org)

Produce Marketing Association, Dr. Trevor Suslow, VP of Food Safety, [tsuslow@pma.com](mailto:tsuslow@pma.com)

United Fresh Produce Association, Dr. Jennifer McEntire, Vice President and Food Safety and Technology, [jmcentire@unitedfresh.org](mailto:jmcentire@unitedfresh.org)

University of Arizona, Dr. Channah Rock, Professor & Extension Specialist, [channah@cals.arizona.edu](mailto:channah@cals.arizona.edu)

Western Growers, Hank Giclas, Sr. Vice President, Strategic Planning, Science & Technology, [hgiclas@wga.com](mailto:hgiclas@wga.com)